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THREE ALUMNI WHO BECAME DEANS

Dean Holley '70

Leads Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern

Dannye Holley '70 has been a law professor, a scholar, an administrator – and, of course, a student. He brings the lessons of all of those experiences to his work as dean of Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law, a job that holds him accountable to faculty, staff, alumni, students and the university.

Those skills began in his native Buffalo, where he was a UB undergraduate before entering SUNY Buffalo Law School. After earning a master of laws degree at the University of California, Berkeley, Holley returned to Buffalo and taught at the Law School for five years, principally in his specialty area of criminal law. He also ran summer programs for incoming law students and traveled widely, especially in the South, "telling the Buffalo story" and recruiting minority applicants to help diversify a then mostly white student body.

Now he is nearly two years into his permanent deanship at Thurgood Marshall, after a one-year interim posting, leading a Houston law school whose 600 students are mostly African-American and of Hispanic origin.

"We have a unique national niche," Holley says, "because we are one of the few schools that is predominantly minority. In the *U.S. News & World Report* diversity index, we rank No. 1 or 2 or 3 every year as the most diverse law school in the country. For the most part, our students are not students whose mom or dad or uncle are connected with the legal profession. So we have a lot of teaching initiatives. One of my challenges is to make sure we have enough academic support to give our students the chance to succeed."

Like law schools nationally, Thurgood Marshall has seen a decrease in



applications recently, Holley says. "Whenever the pendulum swings down, it is going to affect us as well as everybody else," he says. "People don't see a clear likelihood that they will economically benefit from the three years they spend in law school. I think the profession as a whole is going to have to pay a lot more attention to this issue."

And the deanship, he acknowledges, is in large part a game of numbers. Like SUNY Buffalo Law, Thurgood Marshall is part of a public university, a fact that introduces into the budgeting equation an element of political uncertainty. "You have to figure out what you can control and what you can't," Holley notes. Then there are the continuing challenges of fundraising from donations and negotiating with the university on the proportion of tuition money that the law school can retain for its programs.

It is a different skill set from, say, understanding the rules of evidence.

But Holley worked on budget planning a decade ago when he served as associate dean, and says he depends on the current associate dean for finance as he asks "what if" questions: "What if we do this? What would result in additional revenue, and how much of it is limited because it has to be spent on certain things and not on others, and is there a way of loosening those restrictions if you move the money from one category to another?"

But he still teaches – criminal law for the first-years, evidence for the 2Ls and criminal law procedure for the 3Ls – as is the tradition for the school's deans and associate deans. And he makes a point of getting face time with the students, meeting with student leadership often and, once every semester, meeting with each class – "just talking about current issues and concerns, upcoming events, what our plans are."

It is that sense of responsibility to multiple constituencies that Holley says is the defining characteristic of life in the dean's office. But, he says, it is gratifying to be able to set the tone for the school and help others to share in the mission.

"If you have an investment in the institution's welfare and some vision for manageable institutional progress that drives what you're doing, that is my way of thinking that the job is rewarding," he says. "You don't have to see it as a status position; it is something you're doing hopefully for the greater good and with an endgame in mind. You have to communicate to other people specific things that you think are the most important issues that the institution should be concentrating on, and get other folks to at least accept that those are worthy goals."